

LIA LEBRE //

LIA: As a musician and visual artist, how do you approach music and visual art similarly / differently?

SEBBE: In terms of music, I've practiced guitar enough that my hands will go where I want them to. I don't think about it nearly as musically as some people do, I still think visually when I'm making music. Like, "Oh, my hand looks cool when I play this riff." I love whatever that quality is you get from heavy drums, bass and high gain guitar—something about that and the way it makes me feel—the idea of speed, power and anger. But also the weird underlying nurturing quality about hardcore punk often gets overlooked. It's easy to get the hardcore vibe from making a hardcore band, but I think it's a quality that's not necessarily accessible to everyone. I'm striving to find some way to convey the way punk makes me feel with my visual art.

How do you find your different practices intersect? Would you even say you have separate practices?

LIA: The hardest thing to figure out is painting in relation to punk art. Putting paintings and punk art in the same place is always hard thing to do. Even when they're posted on the same website they often feel very disparate. I feel the need to categorize painting and punk art separately,

and I'm not sure if that impulse is right or wrong. Recently I've been spending a lot more time on illustration and my illustrative work is really similar to the flyers I make. My flyers are leading my artistic growth, in a way, because I have to keep thinking of ways to make them different. Every time I make one it pushes me to experiment with new techniques and formal devices. There's a lot more of a relationship in terms of punk art and illustration but I still feel like having a painting practice sits outside of punk art. I feel like you feel the same way too.

SEBBE: Yeah oil painting doesn't really fit into punk rock so well for a number of reasons.

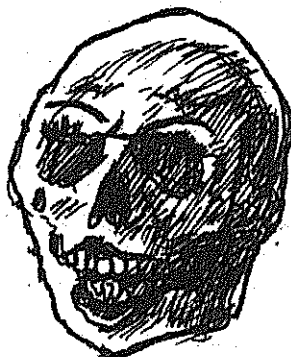
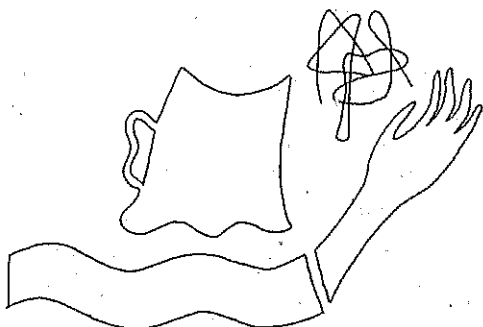
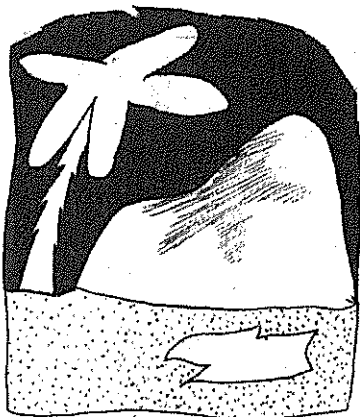
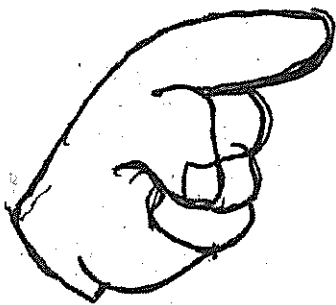
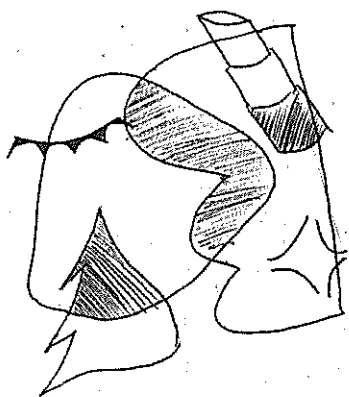
LIA: I think they can look alike though. It's really fun to try and integrate illustrative qualities into oil paintings. I feel like I can actually show them together in certain spaces, like the Not Dead Yet 2015 art show for instance. I had a painting up among some of my show flyers. The intersection of my various practices is something I haven't worked out yet, and maybe it's something that's not supposed to be worked out.

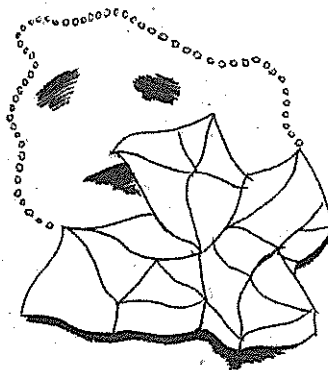
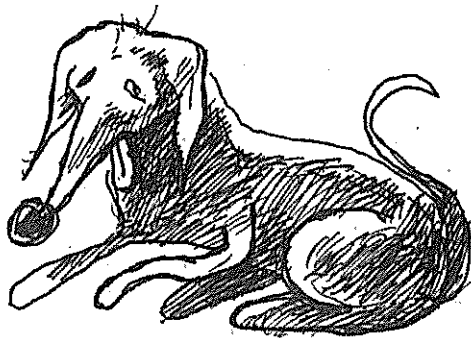
As an artist who works and exists within different worlds of art making, what are some qualities of a good artist that are universal to every kind of artist?

SEBBE: A good quality is definitely knowing how to navigate both positive and negative space. When I crosshatch, for example, I feel like I need to learn to render less and still give it the same impact and depth. It's more about building up muscle memory to the point where you just know how to describe forms as efficiently as possible. And I think the best punk artists also know how to convey maximum impact with minimal information. But it also needs to be tasteful and start with a good structure and good idea. No matter how much time you spend on it, a bad idea is a bad idea. Like, if you do a photorealistic painting of Hunter S. Thompson, it's just gonna suck. Something I do like is having not a bad idea, but a bad drawing and salvaging it through brute force. It's the same quality as cereal boxes where there's a shitty cartoon, but someone's obviously gone in on illustrator and given this Rice Krispie character a lot of depth somehow. I like that shit a lot.

LIA: What are some traps that you see other punk artists falling into? What are some things you see people keep doing that are overdone or ineffective? Are there certain qualities you find in your peers or other contemporary artists that are problematic?

SEBBE: People doing stuff for the sake of doing it. Like people wanting to say they're in a band, but not really caring what it sounds like and just wanting to be on stage and have your friends pat you on the back. I see people who are my peers and older than me falling into the trap of doing a lot of shading, or falling flat on the basics, like line weight and depth, which can be excruciating. Things like a foot being in front of a head when it shouldn't be.





LIA: There are definitely artists whose work I am totally oversaturated with and so used to seeing to the point where I can't even pay attention to their work when it's put in front of me. Something I was thinking about when I came up with that question is how I'm personally really tired of people overusing certain imagery, and in general as an artist you have to be aware of the history certain images have and you have to know what's already been done.

SEBBE: Yeah, no matter what, you do have to interact with the canon on some level.

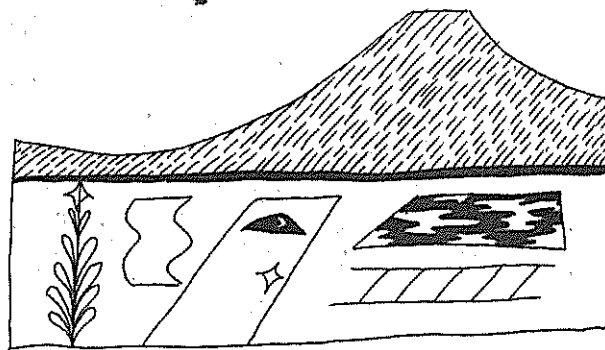
LIA: Because, if you think you're doing something that's really revolutionary but it's actually quite cliché, it's not going to function the way you want it to. Like people overusing punk imagery, I'm so tired of that.

SEBBE: I still use skulls a lot, I just really love drawing them, but I try to give the skull a new context. You can reuse imagery by taking it out of context, without leaning into cultural appropriation. I have a lot of belief that there isn't so much of a separation between things, like queer culture and straight culture because there's so much exchange. Like Rob Halford introducing bondage into heavy metal culture, and conversely gay people introducing military dress from straight culture. So there's this constant exchange and it's the same thing between punk and metal. I think all these sub genres like crossover and thrash, it's always been the same thing but they give and take a bit from each other. At the same time there's been a lot of whitewashing and straightwashing of hardcore and punk, and that's a big problem.

LIA: Right, not acknowledging where it came from.

SEBBE: Yeah, unfortunately hardcore and punk is definitely thought of as white, straight music. Race and gender are two totally different lanes that need to be dealt with in their own way and I can't really speak about race because I'm white, but what I can speak for is gender, where essentially

people come into the hardcore community, maybe from the queer community. People try to "queer" hardcore. I personally feel pretty gay when I two-step, like that's when I want to dance. All the power to people who wanna have top 40 dance parties and stuff, but punk and hardcore is just as effective at expressing these things, because there is definitely a "queer" undercurrent to it. We can say that the Cro-Mags are probably one of the most influential bands behind macho metal core, but Harley Flanagan, before he did Cro-Mags, he was in a band with a bunch of faggots. In the Stimulators, the singer was a gay man, and the guitar player was a lesbian. She was called Denise and she was a super tech, amazing guitar player. This band also took a lot of inspiration and existed alongside Bad Brains, an all Black hardcore band who are definitely the best hardcore band of all time to this day. And you look at this influence and you see the foundation of NYHC, it's not white and it's not straight. It's simply been co-opted by a bunch of macho dicks. But bottom line, the vibe is still there. Same thing with heavy metal, all these things got co-opted but the gay vibe is still there and comes out in weird ways. People don't even realize it. I don't think androgyny in metal is a coincidence. What I'm trying to do is express this in my art, because I



always hated when people would tell me I made a "boy painting."

Where do you see punk aesthetic going? At this point it seems people are making clichés of clichés.

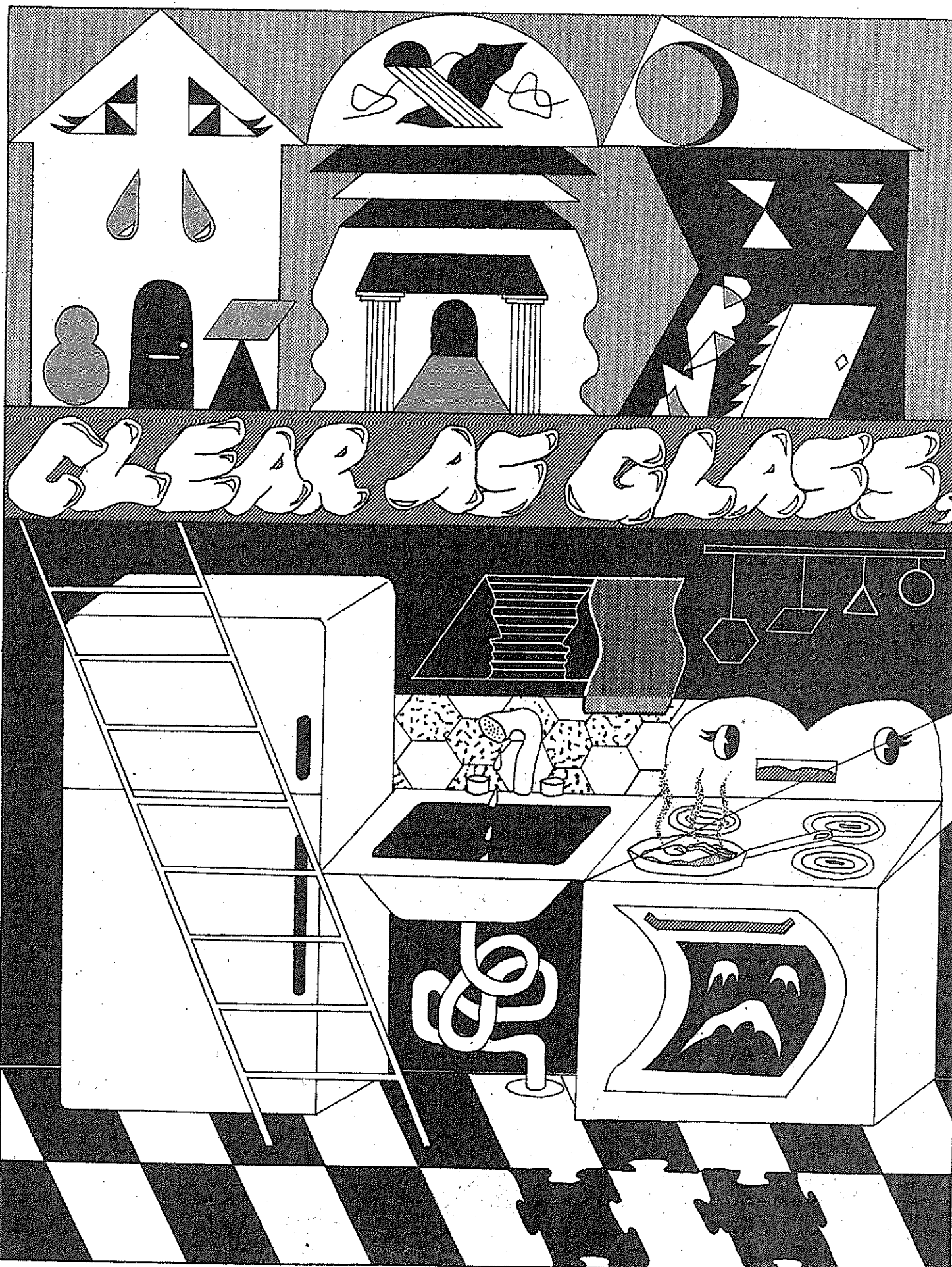
LIA: I'm really into the idea of punk art that doesn't look punk. It's always exciting and refreshing for me to see. It's fun for me to make work that complements the music but is also surprising.

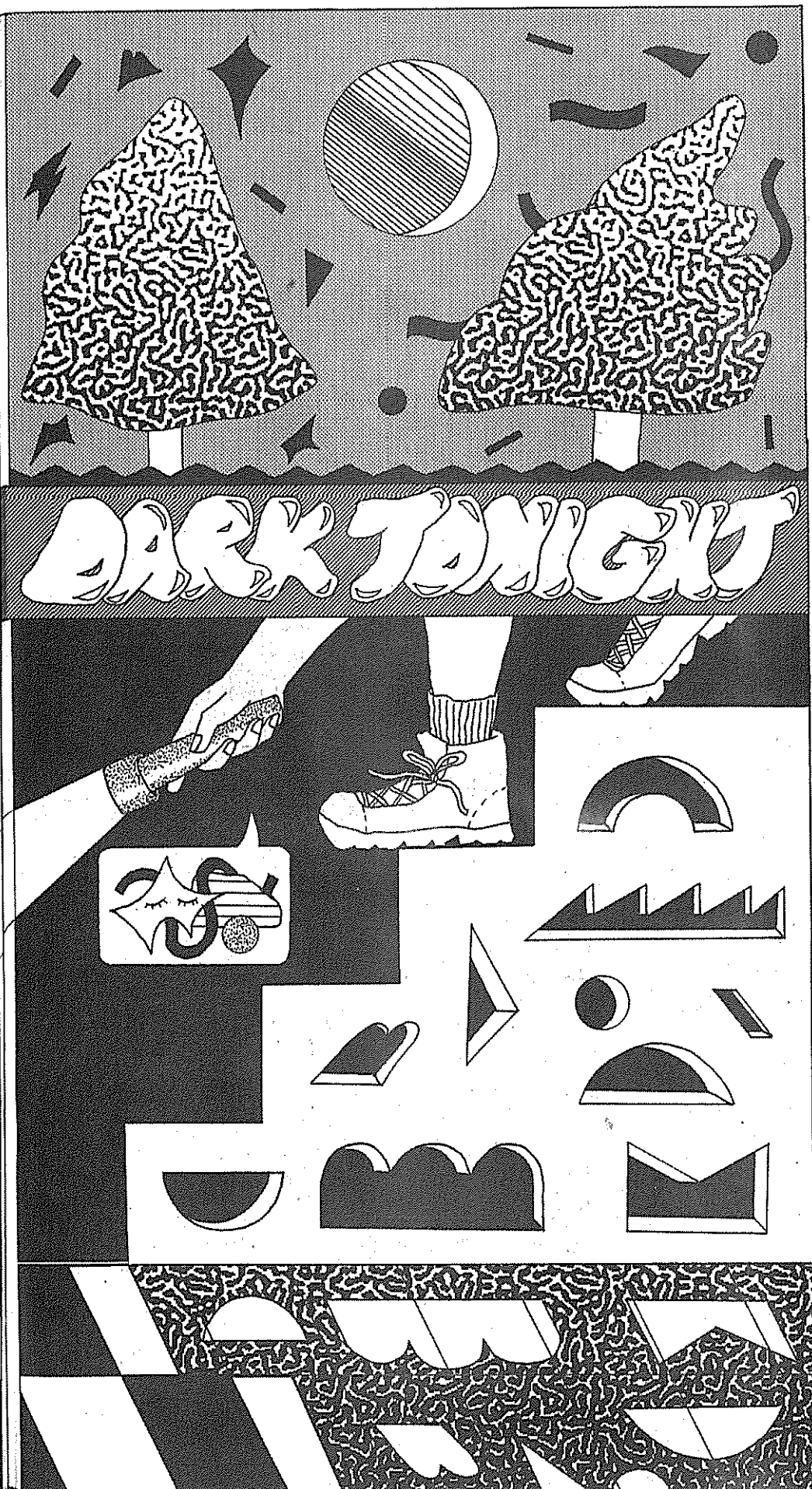
SEBBE: So people actually listening to what the music needs opposed to relying on what's expected for the sub genre?

LIA: Yeah. I enjoy a concise aesthetic to accompany a band's music. Mark Winter is a good example—he's done art for his bands Coneheads and Big Zit, among countless others. You could talk about how derivative it is of Keith Haring, but that's more interesting to me than ripping off Raymond Pettibon. I like seeing punk artwork that looks like the other kinds of art I like. I like seeing attention to craft and proficiency in the chosen medium.

SEBBE: That seems to be where we're going with punk in general. We're at a point where

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punk isn't the most accessible form of music to make anymore. Now that you can make music with just a laptop it actually seems like quite an undertaking to actually get together with two or three other people. At that point you might as well put more effort into being a band. As much as we talk about proficiency and skill we also know about the importance of simplicity. But what is the difference between simplicity and laziness?

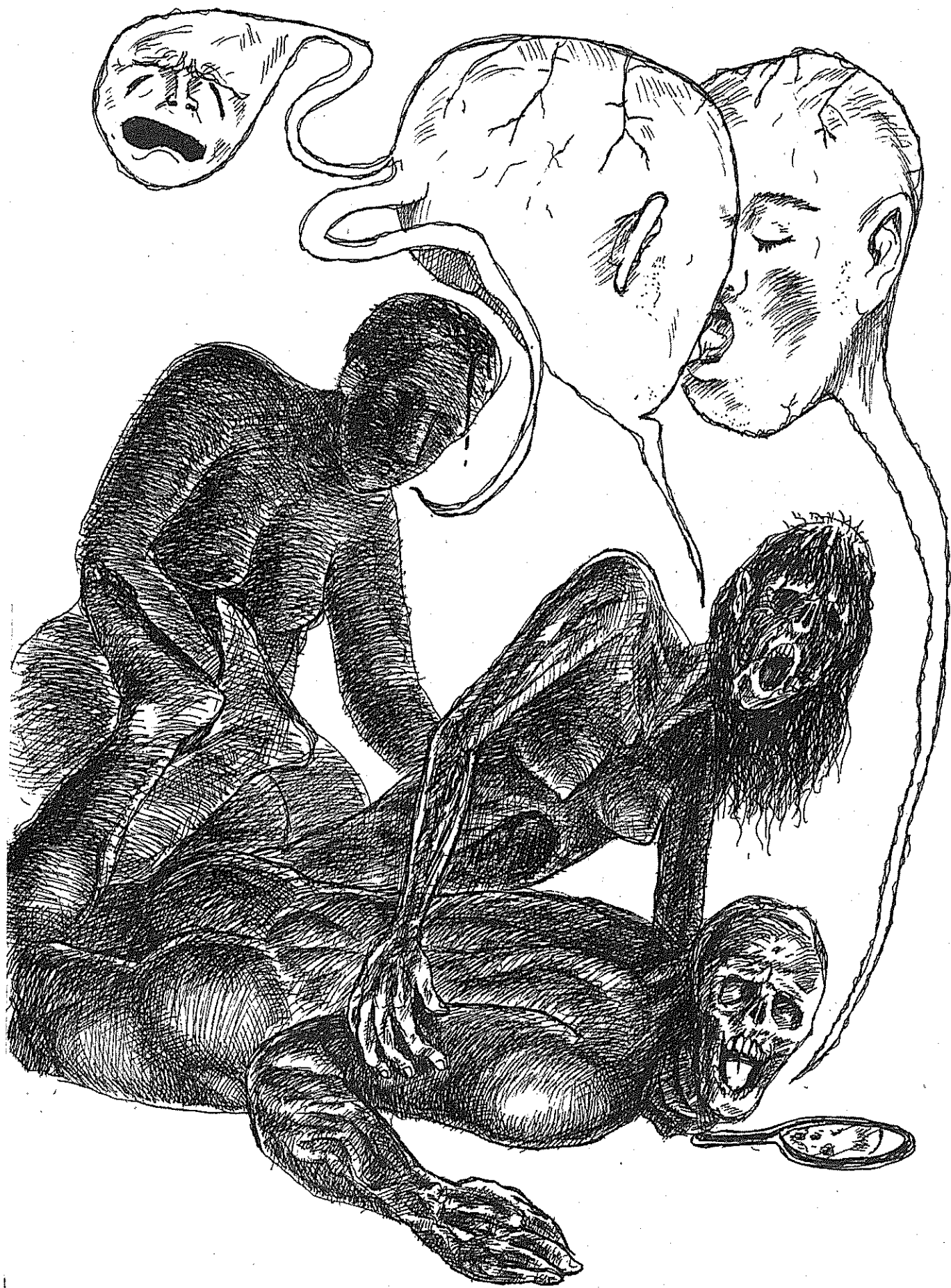
LIA: A mistake I often see being made is people making simple stuff because they think it's easy. There's a trend in my sphere of awareness of illustration of people doing simple, "naïve" work. You can really tell when people are just copying what they've seen has become popular and aren't putting any of themselves into what they're doing. It's really easy to read and consume and I think it's lazy when you're not trying to do anything new. Simplicity isn't the problem, it's people basically relying on readymade aesthetics. If you rely on anything too much it feels lazy, like if your whole thing is just stippling. It's also way better to make something ugly if it's provoking. Not in terms of using nasty imagery but in terms of defying conventions.

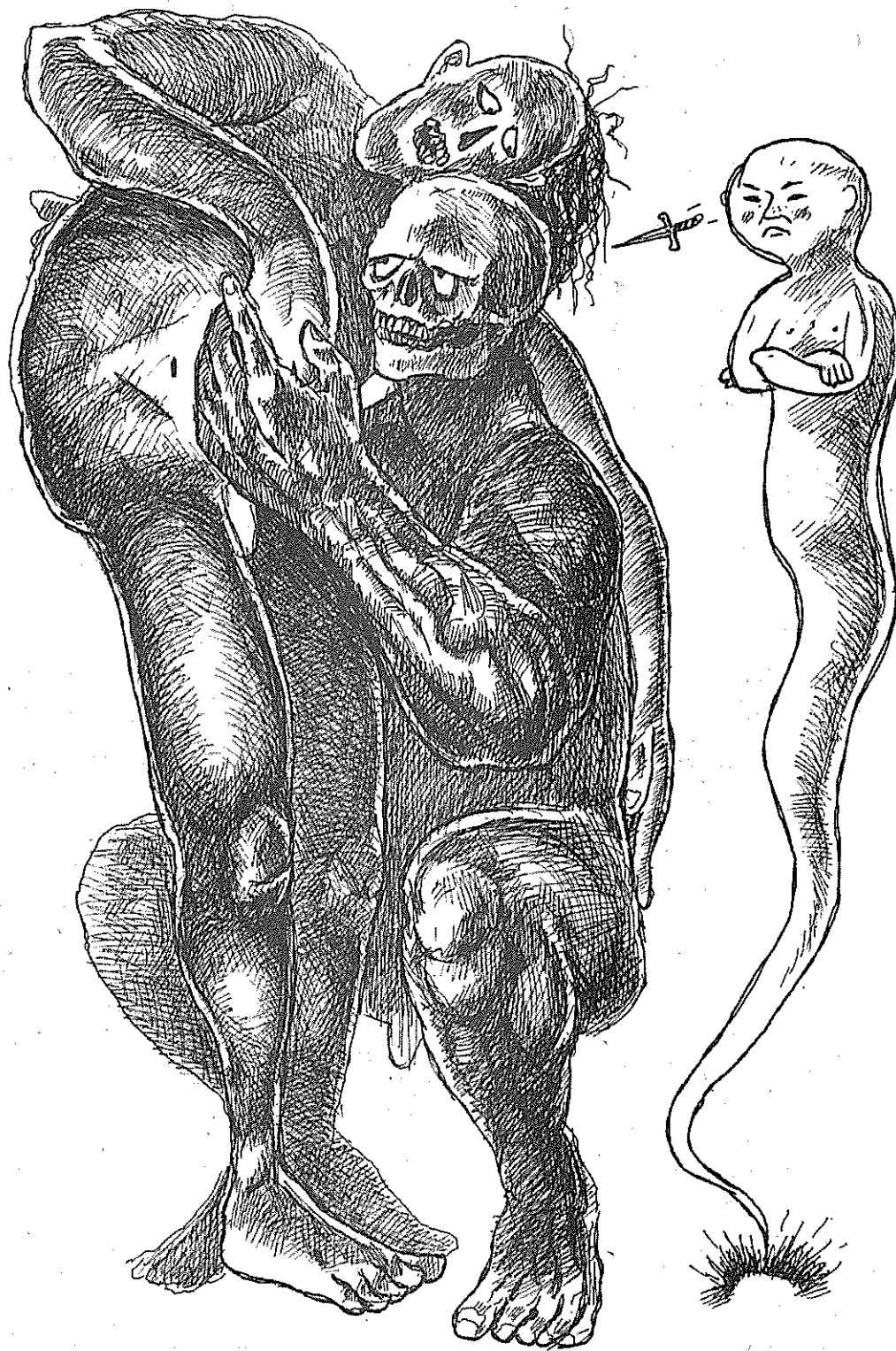
SEBBE: Yeah I guess something time consuming can be lazy too.

LIA: If you're going to make something detailed but it's still really boring, I don't think that's any better than making something simple. I think the best artists are the ones you can see moving towards something rather than just doing the same thing 50 times. I'll get really into an artist, but I'll stop following them if I get oversaturated with their work. The internet plays a large role in our tendency as artists to overproduce and over-publish. I mean, I get a lot of validation posting something online and getting responses. It's the same satisfaction that you feel when you get a facebook notification or something. There's a lot of pressure to keep up a web presence and I think a lot of people are motivated by having a web following. Unfortunately the work is sometimes so quickly produced and consumed that it's not always being fully considered by neither the viewer or the artist.

Do you apply different morals to your practice as a punk artist as opposed to your practice outside of punk?

SEBBE: This spread is the first time I've





melled what I've been working on at art school and what I've been working on punk poster-wise, and it's bringing it into the punk art print media world. For the most part I had been adhering to clichés as a punk illustrator, drawing what people would ask me to draw for them and that's the main difference. I don't actually have creative control when I'm doing punk art a lot of the time.

LIA: What I was thinking when I was asking this question had less to do with imagery and medium, but more to do with how you value the work. When I make a punk poster, I don't expect compensation for it because there is a different expectation. There is a different sort of commodified value placed on that. For one thing, the posters I usually make are for my own band's shows, so the payoff is that I get people to see my work, I get people to pay more attention to the show and to my band, and I'm working for myself in a way. Even when I'm not doing a poster for a show for my own band, I'm still benefiting from this sort of exchange of punk goods. It's still working in that economy. That's different from when a bigger punk band that's not my friend asks me to do something. There's money to be made, or when there's something totally unrelated to music or punk or whatever, there's a different set of morals and expectations to it. Do you feel like you're selling out to do something for a larger company or band? Where do you draw the line from promoting yourself and doing work for free?

SEBBE: There are varying degrees of experimentation I would use, if I'm doing a poster I'm not getting paid, so I'm not going to spend more than three hours doing this. I'm going to do this with ink and line drawings, I'm going to draw some cliché punk shit. I'm gonna try and make it kinda fresh, but at a certain point, how often do people really look at posters? Posters only lead to you doing more posters, and shirts lead to you doing more shirts, and I personally like doing shirts because you get paid, you get a shirt and it's more valuable. No one flyers anymore, it's just a cover photo on an event page no one looks at. I can't remember specifically what any posters look like even, but I remember shirts because people do put in more effort and it's not solely a way to communicate.



LIA: I would disagree with you on that. I feel like if you make a good poster, people want to share it, and people sharing it is the only way the draw will be better for the show. I also will say that doing posters has led me to doing a lot of other things, like album artwork, t-shirts, and something like this spread. I feel like now that I have this body of flyers, that's something that is really cool to look back on. I find a lot of value in it.

SEBBE: I'll just admit that my flyer game is actually just lazy, because I am actually super motivated by money.

LIA: That's totally fair! Your flyers though for the record are really sick and memorable. I also will admit that the last few flyers I've done, I've spent way too much time on for them to be really practical. When I was doing the collage ones, they wouldn't take me more than a couple hours but now that I'm drawing them, they take me a long time.

SEBBE: Now that I'm not in school anymore I'm thinking, there's no time to be lazy with posters because it is still exposure, and at a certain point if we keep going with it and keep doing these really tech posters then eventually a bigger promoter will probably pay you for it. You'll probably still get fucked, but at least it is exposure and it just looks good to have it around.

LIA: I also find a lot of pleasure in making them because I feel like every time I've done a flyer it's taken me another step further into building technique. Like, if I look at all the ones I've done they force me to do something, they also force me to do something where already the idea is there, the information that I have to display has been decided for me, so that's already one decision made. It has to

conform to showing this text. So, I like doing them as an exercise though I think I am starting to spend too much time on them, but it's also helped me to build a presence as a punk artist. That's sort of been why people know about what I do. So that's sick.

SEBBE: You'll find ways to be more efficient though. And I think you're doing the right thing, I'm gonna try and follow your lead because I haven't felt like the last few posters I've done were a good representation of what I've been doing. People can probably sense that I don't like doing them.

LIA: Doing posters is also a really easy way of doing a series. Already it's a category, it's a way to put things in a timeline and put them together in a way that they can be seen.

SEBBE: I think the smartest thing you've done with the posters is you've realized it was an online medium, and the handbill doesn't matter, as long as it's high contrast enough so that it's legible when photocopied in black and white, who cares.

LIA: Are there some contemporary artists who you think are doing a good job right now? Artists in and outside of punk and ones who are bridging the gap? I think 2016 is quite a unique time to be working in and I think we've never been quite so involved with digital media. It's impossible to make work without referencing digital media, so, who are you looking to right now?

SEBBE: It's bad but pretty much no one other than my friends! *[laughs]*

LIA: Oh shit!

SEBBE: I don't know, I need to get better at

that and it's pretty bad, to this day. I mean I'm definitely drawing influence from stuff.

LIA: Are you drawing influence from people who are not contemporary?

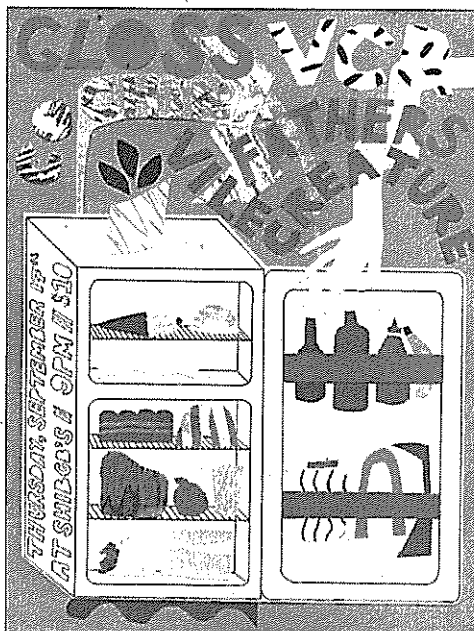
SEBBE: Yeah, I'm thinking of Robert Crumb, Goya, Tom of Finland. I personally wouldn't devote my life to drawing sex but I like the devotional quality of erotic art. I'll admit I don't look at enough stuff. I think the punk illustration that Patrick Kyle has done has been pretty strange and good.

LIA: Have you seen Olivia Gibb's work? She is a great punk artist, in my opinion the best one. She's in this band called Warm Bodies. She combines collage and drawing in a way that feels very fine art, and I like the way she disregards punk art conventions. Lots of wet and dry media combos. If I had to say there's anyone whose work I'm inspired by, it's hers.

SEBBE: One artist I like is Heather Benjamin. Oh yeah, I love this shit. And Rubi Purga! She's super tech and also super simple, and all her colour palettes are ridiculous.

LIA: I would also say she's one of the most unique artists I've ever seen.

SEBBE: Simone Blain. Simone's work looks so simple but it's actually so tech. Like there'll just be some dots, but she'll be like "oh yeah those dots, I made a stencil and very carefully put like seven layers of paint there." I also want to give shout outs to Alexa Hawksworth and Jackson Mill! Alexa's work is similar to Rubi's in that she has amazing technical skill but



also integrates a lot of more simple graphic elements. Jackson is just wild and one of the most unique illustrators/animators I've ever met. All of the artists I mentioned make tough but sentimental work and those kinds of qualities really speak to me. This sink that is postmodernism has backed up and overflowed and you can see beautiful shit accidentally happening everywhere.

How is your understanding and use of media different now than it was when you started doing punk art?

LIA: I used to have a really limited idea of what punk art could be—in my mind it was always black and white and rough looking. I tried to apply what I learned in art school to my punk artwork but it always felt really disconnected from the rest of my practice. I find any media can work, but you just have to find the right application. It's definitely practical to have a poster in black and white if you're thinking about printing handbills. I find so much of the time though my posters just end up online so it's actually more important for it to grab people's attention and be unique in that context, so color becomes an important tool.

SEBBE: How are you personally moving forward then?

LIA: Have you heard that statistic about people on average only spending like 30 seconds looking at a painting in a gallery? It's frustrating and mostly true. That's why I like print media and books—because it's something you own and can look over again and again. It's easier to feel the influence of that work on your life. I also feel like it's harder to have an honest dialogue about fine art, like painting. A lot of the time, people don't want to talk about how a painting makes them feel, the conversation

always veers towards historical art references. I don't have that much art history knowledge or much knowledge of history in general so I don't feel like I can have that kind of fine art discourse.

SEBBE: Do you feel like punk art is different from illustration?

LIA: I stopped trying to separate my punk style and illustration style. Once you throw out your preconceived notions of what punk art is you remove that boundary. It lies more in the way the creator sees it. Asking an illustrator outside the scene to do a poster or a shirt feels really different from asking a punk. A lot of punks just make art for their own bands because it's free art work and you have more creative control over how your band is represented. It's the visual companion to the music.

SEBBE: My friend lovingly studs and adorns their clothing as well as reproducing band logos by hand on banners and clothes. Would you consider that art? Is that a punk art practice?

LIA: There's a lot of intersections between making. When you're talking about fine art you're talking about process. I think punk processes are valued in a different way, and a handmade item is more valuable most of the time. I was in an experimental art class at OCAD [Ontario College of Art and Design] and one of the projects was to make a replica of an object. I wanted to make a reproduction of a punk shirt, but people were like, "Why are you making a t-shirt?" I wasn't allowed to make the connection between fine art and punk process. It was seen as invalid to make the connection between conceptual art, fan art, and bootlegging. Apparently I was missing the point. I had a classmate who made a loaf

of bread out of concrete, and that's great, but that's not something I'm interested in.

SEBBE: Tell me a bit about your relationship to band merch since that's primarily where our art ends up at this point in our careers.

LIA: Even before I was into punk I was into merch. I gravitate towards graphic work. I prefer owning shirts over records, and I'm sure people will have a problem with that. I buy records but not to own vinyl, y'know? I collect band merch because it's nice to support people by buying their shit. I like making merch because I like making stuff I know I would want to own. I just like to live a life full of stuff. I like that everything in my home has a unique visual character.

SEBBE: Merch not only looks good but it's evidence of an experience.

LIA: The reason I put work into shirts is because people wear them. It continues to build presence for your band. You're making a brand, but I do just love the objects themselves. I like seeing what people will do with what I make. Will they dye it, bleach it, cut it? The same shirt will look different on different people too. When I see my friend Sadie wearing a shirt I think about how punk and how good she looks. I like that wearing punk shirts means integrating that visual culture into your identity. It's also the lowest form of an artist's multiple and takes on a life of its own as you wear it.

SEBBE: It's also relatively durable. There's so much less stopping you from forming a relationship with the object. It's definitely one of my favorite ways to experience art.

